

A Prophecy About Babylon Confirms the Accuracy of the Bible

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The history of Babylon was told in the Bible hundreds of years before it happened! How did the prophet Isaiah know the future?

Isaiah was a prophet who began to prophesy the year that King Uzziah of Judah died, which was around 740 B.C. ([Isaiah 6:1, 8](#)). One of his predictions was about the city Babylon.

In the Bible, [Isaiah 13:1](#) says, “The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.” At the time of Isaiah’s prediction, Babylon was one of the largest and most important cities in the world. This is what God told Isaiah would happen to Babylon:

“Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there” ([Isaiah 13:17-20](#)).

Isaiah claimed that God told him that Babylon would be completely destroyed.

The Assyrians destroy Babylon

During Isaiah’s lifetime, the Assyrian Empire ruled most of the Middle East. The

Assyrians controlled many foreign cities, including Babylon. After Isaiah made his prediction, Babylon rebelled against the Assyrians several times. When Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, captured the city in 689 B.C., he decided to destroy the city forever so that it could never rebel again. Sennacherib made this inscription about his victory:

“I made its destruction more complete than by a flood. That in days to come the site of that city, and (its) temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow” (Daniel D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1926-1927, Vol. 2, p. 152).

Isaiah’s prophecy was not fulfilled when Sennacherib destroyed Babylon. Isaiah predicted that the Medes would attack Babylon. But it was the Assyrians who attacked and destroyed the city first.

When Isaiah wrote his prediction, the Medes were weak. Most of the Medes were ruled by other nations, and the remaining Medes were not unified (*The Cambridge History of Iran*, 1985, Vol. 2, p. 80). It would have been impossible for them to capture or destroy the strong city of Babylon. Isaiah’s prediction appeared to be wrong. When the Assyrians destroyed Babylon in 689 B.C., Isaiah’s prediction appeared to be completely impossible. The Medes could not fight against a city that was gone!

Babylon rebuilt

Sennacherib thought that he had destroyed Babylon forever. But after Sennacherib died, his son Esarhaddon began to rebuild Babylon. Soon Babylon became an important city in the Assyrian Empire like it had been before.

In 626 B.C., Babylon rebelled against Assyria again. This time the Babylonians were successful. A local leader, Nabopolassar, became the king. He was able to establish Babylonia as a separate kingdom and Babylon began to grow in strength.

The Medes were also growing in strength at this time. Media managed to become independent from Assyria and expel the armies of the Scythians that had invaded their country (Herodotus 1.95, 106). In 612 B.C. the king of Media and the king of Babylon formed an alliance and fought together against Nineveh, the last capital city of Assyria. They captured the city and burned it. Within a few years the Babylonians and Medes had completely destroyed the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonians took most of the former Assyrian lands, and the Medes took what

remained.

By 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon, the Babylonian Empire had become the leading empire in the world. Nebuchadnezzar focused on expanding his empire and on expanding Babylon to become the greatest city in the world. He built a beautiful palace, rebuilt and repaired the walls, improved the city streets and embellished the temples.

When Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C., Babylon was truly one of the most magnificent cities in the world. Isaiah had predicted that God would destroy Babylon—but now Babylon was greater than it had been in Isaiah's lifetime. However, Babylon's greatness would not last forever.

The Medes grow in power

A few years later, in 559 B.C., Cyrus the Great became king over Persia, a region under the rule of Media. The Persians were a tribe of people closely related to the Medes. Cyrus' father was a Persian prince, and his mother was the daughter of the king of Media (Herodotus 1.107, 122). In about 550 B.C. Cyrus overthrew his grandfather, the king of Media, and became the king of both Media and Persia. Cyrus quickly began to build an empire. In 546 B.C. he conquered the Greek kingdom of Lydia (in western Turkey). In 539 B.C., Cyrus' army came to fight against Babylon.

Babylon was a very strong city. Two thick walls and a large moat protected the city, making it extremely difficult for an enemy to attack. However, Babylon was divided into two parts. The larger part of the city was built on the east bank of the Euphrates River, and a smaller part of the city was on the west bank of the river. Babylon had strong walls, but it also relied on the Euphrates River and the moat around the city to protect it.

The Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote about Babylon about 100 years later, described how Cyrus' army captured the city. Part of the army went north of Babylon and dug a trench from the Euphrates River to a nearby marsh. When the army connected the trench to the Euphrates River, much of the water in the river flowed toward the marsh, while only a little water continued to flow toward Babylon. While the Babylonians were confidently celebrating a feast, the strong river and moat protecting the city became very shallow, and the Medes and Persians were able to enter the city (Herodotus 1.191). They captured the city without a battle, and Darius the Mede was put in charge ([Daniel 5:31](#)).

Isaiah's predictions fulfilled

Finally, nearly 200 years after Isaiah wrote about Babylon, part of his prophecy was fulfilled. God told Isaiah, "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it" ([Isaiah 13:17](#)). The Medes captured Babylon, just as Isaiah predicted. They captured the city without a battle and did not plunder the city. However, the other details of the prophecy had not happened yet.

Isaiah said that the Medes would kill many people: "Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children" ([Isaiah 13:18](#)). This prediction was fulfilled several years later.

An inscription written on a rock cliff in Bisotun, Iran—made by Darius, king of the Medes and Persians—describes the event. In 521 B.C. the Babylonians appointed their own king and the city rebelled. Darius' army defeated the rebel army and captured Babylon. Then the rebel king and his main followers were impaled inside the city.

In about 482 B.C. Babylon rebelled against their Persian and Median rulers again. Xerxes the king sent his army to capture the city. The army destroyed the temples and took away the idol of the Babylonian god Marduk (Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, 7.17.2; Herodotus 1.183). Xerxes may have also destroyed the outer walls of Babylon.

After this punishment the city began to decline in importance. When Alexander the Great defeated the Persians 150 years later, much of Babylon was still destroyed (Arrian 3.16.4). However, many people still lived in Babylon. Alexander decided to rebuild Babylon's temples and make Babylon a marvelous city again, but he died before he could accomplish his plan.

Babylon abandoned

After Alexander's death, Seleucus I gained control of a large part of the Middle East, including Babylonia. He did not share Alexander's grand vision for Babylon. Instead he built a new city called Seleucia, nearby on the Tigris River. An ancient clay tablet shows that Seleucus' son ordered most of the population of Babylon to move to this new city in 275 B.C. (M.M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World From Alexander to the Roman Conquest*, 1981, p. 241).

After that time Babylon wasn't a major city anymore. About 250 years later the Roman writer Strabo wrote, "Seleucia at the present time has become larger than Babylon, whereas the greater part of Babylon is so deserted that one would not hesitate to say... 'The Great City is a desert'" (Geography, 16.1.5, Loeb Classical Library). Before long Babylon was completely empty.

In 1899, German archaeologists went to the area in Iraq called Tell Babil, and they began to dig and uncover parts of ancient Babylon. In 1978, the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, began to rebuild some of the ancient buildings of Babylon. Some of the temples have been built again and also a palace, some walls and an amphitheater (Amatzia Baram, Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89, 1991, p. 47).

But today, Babylon is still an empty city. In times of peace tourists can go see the partially rebuilt ruins of Babylon that have remained empty for almost 2,000 years. The city is exactly like Isaiah predicted: "It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation" ([Isaiah 13:20](#)).

How could Isaiah know that the Medes, a weak tribe, would grow in strength and conquer the strong city of Babylon almost 200 years later? How could he know that one of the greatest cities in the world would be abandoned and remain empty for thousands of years? No one can make accurate predictions like these. The events in history show that the prophecies in the Bible really did come from God.

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